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HISTORY AND CONSTRUCTION OF THE STREET RAILWAY
SYSTEM OF HAGERSTOWN, MD.

Submitted By

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For Initiation

Into

The Maryland Beta Chapter of Tau Beta Pi

April 27, 1934.

SUMMARY

The first street railway system in Hagerstown was the Hagerstown Railway Company founded in 1896. This was added to by the formation of other companies which extended the trolley service throughout the county. In Frederick a similar transportation system grew up and by 1904 the tracks of the two systems were connected at Myersville. The Security power plant was built in 1912 to meet the growing demands for electric power made by all the various trolley companies. In the spring of 1913 all of these concerns were combined to form the Hagerstown and Frederick Railway Company. This organization later changed its name to the Potomac Public Service Company because its light and power business was becoming far bigger than its transportation service. In 1922 the Williamsport Power Company was formed to build a steam power plant at Williamsport. This is still the largest power station in the whole system. The Williamsport Power Company combined with the Potomac Public Service Company and the Cumberland Edison Company to form The Potomac Edison Company in 1923. At present the entire electric railway, power, and lighting system of Western Maryland is owned and operated by the Potomac Edison Company. Since 1911 or 1912 the electric railways have been losing importance as a means of transportation, until now many of them have been abandoned and bus service put in their place. Indications show that in the future all the trolley service will be discontinued and other means of transportation used in its place.

HISTORY AND CONSTRUCTION OF THE STREET RAILWAY SYSTEM OF HAGERSTOWN, MD.

The street railway system in Hagerstown is part of an electric railway system which covers most of Washington and Frederick Counties of Maryland, and has tracks in adjacent southern Pennsylvania. This electric railway system is part of a coordinated transportation system which includes bus service throughout Maryland and parts of Virginia, West Virginia and Pennsylvania. The Potomac Edison Company now controls this transportation system that originally was composed of numerous small companies each controlling a very small branch of the system.

THE HAGERSTOWN RAILWAY CO.

The first of these companies in Washington County was the Hagerstown Railway Company. In 1896 Messrs. Lane, Mealy, and Cushwa, of Hagerstown, conceived the idea of building an electric railway system over the streets of Hagerstown and connecting Hagerstown to Williamsport. They also proposed building a track to Funkstown, a suburb of Hagerstown. On March 12 of the same year, with the aid of some outside interests, they incorporated the Hagerstown Railway Company, which was granted franchises to construct and operate these lines. They were also given permission to do a general power and lighting business in Hagerstown and throughout Washington County.

The original franchise ordinance granted the company permission to operate the Mulberry Street loop, the Washington Street line, the South Potomac Street line, and the Summit Avenue line. This formed a rectangular loop of single track six blocks long and two blocks wide. It extended from the business section of town toward the north and east residential sections. The other lines were also single track and they radiated from the loop to the city limits; one west, one southwest, and one south. No other tracks were laid within the city limits of Hagerstown until 1905 when connections were made with the tracks of the Hagerstown and Northern Railway Company.

The ordinance of 1896 also provided that "cars shall be operated daily except Sunday (said Sunday being optional with the said Railway Company) at least from the hours of six o'clock A.M. until eleven o'clock P.M. and at least one car shall be run over each line in each direction every fifteen minutes during the time of running the same each day as above set forth". The speed of all cars was limited to eight miles per hour by the ordinance and it was not until March 13, 1922 that this ordinance was amended to permit speeds of twenty-five miles per hour with a maximum of fifteen miles per hour at street crossings. The Railway Company was required to lay down and maintain all paving between the tracks and for two feet on either side of the tracks. Small amounts of freight were carried over the system but the passenger service made up the bulk of the

business. The passenger cars were at first small single truck cars with overhead trolley and two 600 volt direct current motors, one geared directly to each axel. Later larger cars were used but the overhead trolley and 600 volt direct current motors are still used throughout the system.

The source of power for the electric railway was a small steam power plant located at Lee Street in Hagerstown, where coal was stoked by hand to small boilers. The old fashioned Edison bi-polar direct current generator was used, belted directly to a Corliss engine. This plant furnished power and light for Hagerstown and the vicinity as well as for the trolley cars.

On June 18, 1905 the Hagerstown and Northern Railway Company was incorporated by the same interests that controlled the Hagerstown Railway Company. Their purpose was to construct an electric railway from Hagerstown directly north to the Mason Dixon Line, a distance of about seven miles. As soon as this project was completed the Franklin County Railroad Company of Pennsylvania was incorporated to build six miles of track to connect the northern terminus of the Hagerstown and Northern Railroad to Shady Grove, a small town in Pennsylvania.

In 1901 the Hagerstown and Boonsboro Railway Company was organized to extend the Hagerstown Funkstown line to Boonsboro. The same men who controlled the other companies also controlled this one. They laid the track and began operations in the same year. All of these various companies used the same tracks in Hagerstown, and they operated

as a unit rather than as separate companies.

DEVELOPMENT IN FREDERICK COUNTY

While this development in electric railways was going on in Washington County a similar development was going on in adjacent Frederick County. Hagerstown and Frederick were the centers of the two systems which, as will be shown later, finally grew into one system with main headquarters and load center in Hagerstown.

The first of the electric railway companies in Frederick County was the Monocacy Valley Railroad Company incorporated March 16, 1886. This was the only electric railway in Frederick County until 1894 when The Frederick and Middletown Railway Company was organized to give the farmers in the Middletown Valley an outlet for their produce through Frederick. This company did both freight and passenger business and was the best means of transportation from Middletown to Frederick because of the poor condition of the roads at that time. On April 9, 1898 the Frederick Thurmont and Northern Railway Company was granted its charter. This became a very important route for carrying freight to and from Frederick. The northern end of this railway had physical connections with the Western Maryland Railroad near Thurmont, so that freight cars could be switched from the Western Maryland tracks to those of the Frederick Thurmont and Northern Railway Company and delivered by them to the various business concerns in Frederick. To make these deliveries the street railway system of Frederick was used to advantage and freight was delivered in any part of Frederick without unloading

the cars. Two years later, in 1900, the Frederick Thurmont and Northern Railway Company changed its name to The Washington Frederick and Gettysburg Railway Company but its ambition to build an electric railway from Frederick to Washington was never realized.

THE MERGER OF 1913

By the end of 1901 the two electric railway systems, one centered about Hagerstown and the other at Frederick, had expanded toward each other until there were only seven miles between them. But it was not until March 22, 1904 that the Washington County interests together with local interests about Myersville incorporated the Hagerstown and Myersville Railway Company to construct and operate an electric railway from Hagerstown to Myersville. This completed the link connecting Hagerstown to Frederick by electric railway.

The expansion of the trolley systems and the rapid growth of their business led in 1912 to the feeling that all the companies should combine in an effort to construct a large power plant to insure power for the entire system. In order to do this the Frederick and Hagerstown Power Company was formed to build and operate a power plant at Security, two miles from Hagerstown. The Security Power Plant had four coal stoked boilers each having 175 pounds per square inch working pressure. These supplied steam for two 1500 K.W. Westinghouse turbo-generators and one 500 K.W. Westinghouse turbo-generator used only during peak load. Two rotary converters were also located at Security to supply 600 volt

direct current to the nearby trolley lines.

In order to better coordinate the electric power and transportation systems and unify the control of these companies, there was a merger in 1913 which took in all the companies so far mentioned and several others. The main companies included in this merger were:

The Frederick and Hagerstown Power Company 1912

The Hagerstown and Northern Railroad Company 1907

The Hagerstown and Myersville Railway Company 1904

The Hagerstown and Boonsboro Railway Company 1901

The Myersville and Catoctin Railway Company of Frederick County 1897

The Frederick Gas and Electric Company 1904

The Hagerstown and Frederick Railway Company of Washington County 1896

The Frederick Railroad Company 1909

It should be mentioned that the Frederick Railroad Company which went into this merger was formed in 1909 from a consolidation of The Washington Frederick and Gettysburg Railway Company, The Monocacy Valley Railroad Company, The Jefferson and Braddock Heights Railway Company, and the Frederick and Middletown Railroad Company. Therefore, the merger of 1913 includes every electric railway in Washington and Frederick Counties. The merged companies went by the corporate name, The Hagerstown and Frederick Railway Company, although this soon proved to be an inadequate name. After 1913 the main purpose of the company no longer was to provide

HISTORY OF THE HAGERSTOWN & FREDERICK R.R. CO. TO 1913.

1914	1913	1912	1911	1910	1909	1908	1907	1906	1905	1904	1903	1902	1901	1900	1899	1898	1897	1896	1895	1894	1893	1892	1891	1890	1889	1888	1887	1886	1885	1884				1853
The Hagerstown Railway Co. of Wash. County Md. Mar. 12.																																		
Frederick, Thurmont & Northern Ry. Co. Apr. 9.																																		
The Wash., Frederick & Gettysburg Ry. Co. Dec. 1.																																		
Monocacy Valley R.R. Co. Apr. 10.																																		
Frederick R.R. Co. Mar. 16.																																		
Jefferson & Braddock Heights Ry. Co. June 12.																																		
Frederick & Middletown Ry. Co. April 6.																																		
Frederick & Middletown R.R. Co. Dec. 1.																																		
Hagerstown & Myersville Ry. Co. Oct. 2.																																		
Hagerstown and Boonsboro Ry. Co. March 22.																																		
Myersville & Catoctin Ry. Co. of Frederick Co. June 12.																																		
The Frederick & Hagerstown Power Co. Jan. 20.																																		
Hagerstown & Northern Ry. Co. Mar. 21.																																		
Hagerstown & Northern R.R. Co. June 18.																																		
Franklin County R.R. Co. Jan. 24.																																		
The Frederick Elec. Light & Power Co. of Fred. County Md. Mar. 5.																																		
West End Gas & Elec. Co. Dec. 8.																																		
West End Gas & Elec. Co. of Fred. County. June 30.																																		
Fred. Gas & Elec. Co. June 20.																																		
Peoples Gas Co. of Fred. County. Jan. 9.																																		
Fred. Gas Co. Jan. 30.																																		
Isabella Gas Works																																		

Consolidation

Change of Name

Deed

May 20

electrical transportation; since the light and power business was becoming far larger than the transportation service. Not only was the light and power business becoming larger but the trolley service was competing with an increasing number of busses, taxis and private cars. Although no figures are available earlier than 1926, it is the opinion of officials of the company that the peak of the trolley service was in 1911 or 1912. From that time until the present the electric railway's business has been steadily falling. Because the Hagerstown and Frederick Railway Company no longer seemed a fitting name it was changed in 1926 to The Potomac Public Service Company, which better expressed the purpose of the organization.

By 1926 they were performing a number of different services, for instance they ran trolleys and busses, furnished power and light, sold electrical equipment and had a number of other minor interests. But the company was growing and expanding their power business more than any other branch. They were buying power plants and building up their business throughout Western Maryland. In order to aid this growth and expansion financially as well as with experience, it was arranged that the American Water Works and Electric Company acquire an interest in the Potomac Public Service Company.

THE WILLIAMSPORT POWER STATION

After making a most complete economic and engineering survey of the Potomac Public Service Company, The American Water Works and Electric Company decided to finance the building of a

super-power plant for them. A very careful study of the load center and all possible locations resulted in a decision to build the plant at Williamsport, Md. This is only six miles from Hagerstown, the load center, and it had adequate railroad facilities for coal and supplies. It is on the banks of the Potomac River where it has an abundant water supply for cooling and condensing purposes. The Williamsport Power Company was formed to build this power station and the original installation was completed in 1923. The main generating equipment consisted of a 14,000 K.W. Westinghouse turbo-generator with two 1450 H.P., B. and W. Cross Drum type boilers. But because of the rapid growth of the power company and the demand for higher efficiencies, additional generating power was soon necessary. To keep stride with this demand extension of about eighty feet was made to the boiler room and about sixty feet to the turbine room. In this space was installed an additional Babcock and Wilcox Cross Drum boiler unit of the improved type and a 30,000 K.W. Westinghouse turbo-generator with the necessary auxiliary equipment.

Within a year of the formation of the Williamsport Power Company its name was changed to The Potomac Edison Company and it then acquired all of the property of the Cumberland Edison Power Company. Next, the Potomac Edison Company and the Potomac Public Service Company were consolidated under the name of the Potomac Edison Company which is the present owner and operator of all of the power and transportation systems so far discussed. After this consolidation several

smaller companies were acquired but none of them affected the electric railway system in any way with one exception. When the Blue Ridge Transportation Company became a subsidiary of the Potomac Edison Company on August 3, 1923 the trolley system was coordinated with a bus transportation system that covered most of Maryland and parts of Pennsylvania, Virginia, and West Virginia.

THE TROLLEY SYSTEM AT PRESENT

In the past few years the bus service has been taking the place of the various trolley lines one by one. Many of the lines have been totally abandoned and the tracks taken up. For instance the entire line built by the Hagerstown and Northern Railway Company has been dismantled and bus service is used in its place. Not only is the number of miles of track decreasing fast, but on those routes which are still in use the number of passengers is greatly diminished. This trend is shown very clearly on the accompanying graph titled "Hagerstown and Frederick Railway, Number of Passengers Carried Per Car Mile". As can be seen from the graph there was an average of about three people per car mile in 1926 but in 1933 the average was only 1.25 people per car mile. There is no prospect that this number will increase in the future, so it is just a matter of time until the trolleys are totally displaced by other means of transportation in Hagerstown and the vicinity. There are now left only three routes that operate on a regular schedule in Hagerstown. These are the routes from Hagerstown to Williamsport, and to Frederick, and

the Summit Avenue line.

Mr. Henry Holzapfel, Vice-President of the Potomac Edison Company, states that street railway systems in towns the size of Hagerstown or Frederick are no longer economical and cannot favorably compete with private cars, busses, and taxi cabs. The trolley system in Hagerstown has flourished and in its time performed a valuable service to the people; but its days of usefulness are past. There is no longer any reason for its existence.

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Other valuable information and assistance was supplied by:

Mr. Henry Holzapfel, Vice-Pres. of Potomac Edison Company

Mr. P.W.T. Loy, Vice-Pres. of Potomac Edison Company

Mr. George Twyford, Electrical Engineer of Potomac Edison Co.

Mr. Edgar Koons, Statistician of The Potomac Edison Co.

The Drafting Department of the Potomac Edison Co.



